

# The Albanian Prizren League factor and beyond: distinct developments exposed by the Western sources

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## Abstract

For many countries in Europe, both in the West and in the East, the nineteenth century was critical in their respective paths towards the attainment of national independence goals. Each nation had its own unique struggles in that political course. Albania, and the Albanian nation was no exception. The seizure of the Albanian territory by the Montenegro, Serbia and Greece during the last two centuries severely affected the Albanian nation. The aim of this research, however, is not to focus exclusively on the ways and means related to Albanian territory division, but to delve into foundations of the selected events, with great impact to the Albanian nation. The current developments and challenges in the Albanian territories in the Balkans cannot be productively analyzed without examining the historical context, within which, the Prizren League played a critical part. Indeed, even though the League, at the time, was largely overlooked by the Western powers, still played, an important role in the ensuing Albanian historical developments. The League, initially an Ottoman supporting mechanism, of mutual (Albanian-Ottoman) interest, developed into an autonomous organization revolting to the perceived enemies of the Albanian cause, later, even against the Ottomans.

This study aims to highlight the causes of the formation of the Prizren League, its activities, Albanian revolts against the

perceived enemies and other related topics that painted their ordinary life, in the stipulated period. The objective of the research is to focus exclusively on the Western sources *visa-a-vis* the examined topics in an endeavor, to present, as much as possible, an unbiased picture of events and developments. Numerous themes have been explored in light of many old and authentic sources, in an attempt to enrich the quantity of the examined themes with qualitative inputs. The study also delves briefly on the Western powers' interest in 'solving' the Albanian question in rather idiosyncratic way. Finally, the study concludes that the Prizren League establishment and their respective commitment, determination and cohesion, not only played a critical role at the time, but even today still serves as an inspiration, to the younger generation of Albanians, across the Balkans and beyond.

**Key words:** Prizren League; Albania; Ottoman Empire; Serbia; Montenegro; war;

## 1. Introduction

The developments that preceded the Prizren League (1878-1881), the formation of the League itself, and the events that followed afterwards, played a critical role reshaping, both, the map and the development of the Albanian nation. Following the occupation of the Albanian land, by Balkan orthodox alliance, (during 1876-1878 war campaign), Albanian nation, who lacked proactivity, found itself totally unprepared for such adventure. By the time they actually realized what had happened, Albanians already lost a substantial proportion of their land, and moreover they had to also bear the associated shock, horror and ethnic cleansing of their co-nationals, from their homeland. These circumstances necessitated the creation of national mechanisms for the defense, of both, the people and the territory alike. Such events, therefore, paved the way to the formation of the Albanian Prizren<sup>1</sup> League, with an initial explicit aim to prevent further partition of the Albanian territory.

There are plenty of discussions that concern the establishment of the Prizren League, in relation to the Albanian question, and the respective internal and external impact. The planning, organization and leadership of

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<sup>1</sup> Prizren today is city southern part of the Republic of Kosovo

the League was apparently done hastily, due to lack of proactivity. Consequently this resulted in multifarious and unexpected (and or unprepared) tensions, revolts and skirmishes, with Serbs, Montenegrins, Greeks and Turks<sup>2</sup>, but also within Albanian tribes too.

The paper, above all, intends to test the questions listed below:

1. What led to the creation of the Prizren League?
2. What support had the Prizren League?
3. What led to the eventual extinguishment of the League?
4. What role and activities the Ottoman authorities undertook in Albanian affairs, within the timeframe of the League existence and beyond?
5. What is the legacy of the Prizren League?

## **2. The establishment of the Prizren League**

Though the intent of this research is not to delve exclusively into the role and significance of the Prizren League, (as tackling such a topic is rather voluminous), but to focus on factors related to the incitement and support towards the establishment and the consolidation of the League. The circumstances in the Balkans, between the years 1876-1878, resulted in deterioration of the situation, almost exclusively at the expense of the Albanian nation. The conditions, were, thus ripe for Albanians to show unity and cohesion, in order to encounter the indiscriminate orthodox annexation of the Albanian land. This was also sad news to Turkish Empire as its territory, role and power in the Balkans experienced a radical transformation. Under these circumstances.

“On 10 June 1878, delegates from all over Albania assembled in Prizren to work out a common political platform at the so-called League of Prizren, no doubt initially with a tacit support of the Ottoman authorities. (Elsie, 2012, p.148).

The Balkans developments in this period appeared to have been largely heeded, not only from factors within the region, but also beyond. Unification of the Albanian nation apparently seemed to have been not a matter of choice, but, rather of a severe necessity. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1910), in this context, highlights that “...Moslems and Catholics

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<sup>2</sup> The terms used in this study, such as Ottoman, Porte and Turkey mean the same.

combined to resist the stipulated transference of Albanian territory to Austria-Hungary, Servia and Montenegro and the Albanian League was formed by an assemblage of chiefs at Prizren. The movement, which was instigated by the Porte with the object of evading the provisions of the treaty, was so far successful...". (p.487)

The maturity and pragmatism of the Albanian actions at this period, was indispensable for national cause. The Albanian League, who represented the Albanian nation, appeared to have had two goals:

- a. To mobilize the nation and fight for the rights of co-nationals to live in their territory,
- b. To sensitize the Western community about enduring shock and horror encountered.

The existence of Prizren League was, thus, very crucial. *Britannica* (2019) highlights the importance of the League by underlining that "Albanian League, in full League for the Defense of the Rights of the Albanian Nation, also called League of Prizren, first Albanian nationalist organization...the league, initially supported by the Ottoman Turks, tried to influence the Congress of Berlin, which was formulating a peace settlement following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and which threatened to partition Albania (then part of the Ottoman Empire) and transfer some of its districts to Montenegro, Serbia, and Greece." (ibid).

The Western sources accentuate that the Prizren League was initiated, formed and maintained by the Ottoman administration. *The London Times* (dated 11 January 1881) confirms this when it says, "It will bear repeating again, that the Albanian League has never had any other existence than that which the Porte wished" ('The Greek Preparations For War', 1881, p.4). Porte, however, at least initially, seemingly did not perceive any risk from such organization. This is underscored by the *The London Times* (dated 19 July 1890), when it says, "By the Treaty of Berlin, the small districts of Gussigne and Plava, situated on the borders of Montenegro and Old Servia, were ceded to Montenegro, but Turkish Government endeavoured to evade the execution of this provision of the treaty by secretly organizing an Albanian League, the members of which were ready to swear that they would die rather than allow an inch of Albanian territory to the Giaours [Non-Muslims]." ('Recent Troubles In Old Servia', 1890, p.13).

Indeed, even the resolutions (*Kararname*) of the Prizren League also confirm that the Albanian nation was focused towards preventing division of their land, and did not have initial independence intentions. The articles of the resolutions clearly stated that the League did “oppose any government other than that of the Sublime Porte [the Ottoman empire central government]”<sup>3</sup>, (Pollo and Pulaha, 1978, p.40), **underpin the importance of Turkish Sultan as a leader**,<sup>4</sup>(*ibid*) , all of which “[i]n accordance with our noble religious law (*shariat*)”.<sup>5</sup>(*ibid*) Therefore, Albanian League, did insist “on the sovereignty of the Sultan being maintained” (‘The Revolutionary Movements In Turkey’, 1878, p.10).

### 3. External view on the Albanian – Ottoman relations

As the **Prizren League resolutions accentuate the explicit reluctance of Albanian independent course**, this cannot be said for the Albanian character. Indeed, the Albanians were known for the independent-minded character and bravery. *The New Times* article (dated 20<sup>th</sup> February 1881), while making comparisons, on national (independent-minded) character concludes “the Albanian has always been independent and ...Greek has not. (‘The Greek, and Albanian’, 1881, p.2).

Indeed, the Ottomans had always problem to govern Albanians and actually “never really ruled them”. (‘London’, 1881, p.11) Albania was, however, “confessedly a difficult country to govern...The task of maintaining the law in Albania [was]... notoriously hard.”(‘A carnival of misrule et al’, 1884, p.9) Moreover, many Albanians chose to live in mountains areas, which in turn made Ottoman’s access in those areas very difficult. Newman (1945) highlights this by saying “For generations the Albanians rose in periodic revolt: over the high mountain area the Turkish rule was very shadowy. Many Albanians never even saw a Turk.”(p.232).

All in all, the Albanians were very much concerned with their own affairs, and they rarely or reluctantly endorsed anything that they did not perceive to be productive to their national culture or cause. This, perhaps, seemed to have been overlooked by the Ottomans, as *The London Times* (dated 13 October 1887), underlined by saying, “The Porte seems unable to understand that its sovereignty over Albania is nominal. To make it real the

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<sup>3</sup> Article 1 of the Prizren League Resolutions (*Kararname*) (Pollo and Pulaha, 1978, p.40),

<sup>4</sup> Article 2 of the Prizren League Resolutions (*Kararname*) (*ibid*),

<sup>5</sup> Article 4 of the Prizren League Resolutions (*Kararname*) (*ibid*),

country must be opened out...provided the Albanians allow... They have not shown much indulgence" ('Albania', 1887, p.5).

While Ottomans may not have been able to clearly understand their limited sovereignty over Albania, one should not underestimate the cultural acquaintance level. Ottomans and Albanians were largely familiar to one other, both culturally and character wise, as they lived together, in the Balkan region, for around five centuries.

#### **4. The Albanian relations with foreign powers and respective views**

Faced with expulsions from their land and related horrors, the Albanians felt compelled to remain firm and fight against any enemy, both, internal and external. The anger and protests were directed to various perceived enemies. The Russians, for instance, were accused due to their military troops amassing at the Albanian border. Consequently, "The Albanian League has taken steps to manifest its disapproval of the concentration of Russian troops on the frontier of Old Serbia and Albania" ('Turkey and Afghanistan', 1878, p.5).

Furthermore, Albanians were also ready to resist and fight, not only against Serbia, Montenegro and Greece but also against Austro-Hungary. As noted above, "Moslems and Catholics combined to resist the stipulated transference of Albanian territory to Austria-Hungary". (The Encyclopaedia Britannica 1910, p.487) Indeed, the "Albanian nation ...strenuously [did] oppose the invasion of Novi Bazar contemplated by Austro-Hungarian Government". ('Albania', 1889, p.5) There were initial indications that in 1882 that Austria made it clear that the Albanian factor and respective territory is in Vienna's interest. ('Egypt', 1882a, p.5) Astonishingly, later in 1883, the Albanians were seeking Austrian help ('Current Foreign Topics', 1883, p.5).

However, the way the Albanians were perceived outside in the West, played, seemingly a critical role. At this period, one could rarely find good portrayal or sympathy towards the Albanians. The spreading of this image coupled that, by this time many Albanians embraced Islam, may be the cause why the Western powers were lenient towards the Albanian neighbours, but very unconcerned and indifferent towards the enormous injustices committed towards the Albanians. It was not uncommon to compare Albanians with savages (Austrian Postal Administration in Albania, 1881, p.10), or call them anarchists, a group of unorganized tribes that are also

ready to fight each other, or that “[n]either dynastic nor national influences unite them.” (The Minor States of South-Eastern Europe, 1881, p.6).

Such prejudices did not help the situation, moreover, they were very detrimental to the Albanian cause. All in all, it is hard to tell whether the West had more sympathy towards the Ottomans or the Albanians, or perhaps they were viewed on the equal footing, although, (as highlighted above), the Albanians, character wise, were depicted as rather total independent towards Ottoman administration.

Therefore, unlike Ottoman-Albanian relations, that were generally productive (with some exceptions), the West apparently had limited acquaintance with the Albanians, at this period. This perhaps, may be due to, the West, having had a rare opportunity to become acquainted with the Albanian reality, as Albania and the Albanians, in the Western capitals, failed to receive the attention it deserved. The Western Powers were viewing the Albanians in the Balkans as insignificant, very likely due to proximity with Ottomans. The large Western apathy towards the Albanians seemed apparent from the outcomes of the 1878 Berlin Congress, which shaped the future of many generations to come.

However, there were indications, at least, by the beginning of the 1881, that Western governments began to change tune and be more understandable towards the Albanian cause. In fact, following “the prominent part taken by the British Government in the affairs of Dulcigno...[it was reported that] matters relating to the Albanians ought to have some interest in the eyes of Englishmen.” (Austrian Postal Administration In Albania, 1881, p.10).

### **5. A focus on critical Prizren League developments, the crushing phase and beyond**

The Albanian League, however, had to mobilize and sensitize the Western powers, not only with protest letters, but by 1879 also with face-to-face meetings. Elsie (2012) reaffirms this by saying that in 1879, the Albanian League heads, Abdyl bey Frasheri and Mehmet Ali Vroni, “travelled to Berlin, Paris, Vienna and Rome...to seek support for the Albanian cause and to submit a memorandum of Albanian demands to Great Powers. (Elsie 2012, p.148).

This trip appeared to have been well coordinated with Porte as the Albanian delegates’ diplomatic European tour, to address their grievances,

was hoped to yield constructive results. However, when delegates "returned from their tour in Europe, [they] have transmitted a report to the Grand Vizier informing him that they met with a friendly and encouraging reception, and that by some Governments they were promised that exorbitant demands on the part of Greece would be resisted. ("Turkey', 1879, p.5).

The coordination of joint actions of shared interest did not end here.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Porte also named Abeddin Pasha, an Albanian, as Turkish Foreign Minister, on a mutually beneficial mission, fighting for both, the Albanian and the Turkish interest of the time. ('Turkey', 1880, p.5, Gawrych, 2006, p.68) However, despite the common endeavours undertaken, the results were very unsatisfactory. Consequently, as the Albanian goals were not met, apparently also the relations with the Porte and neighbours, began to deteriorate sensitively.

The relations with the Ottoman authorities reached a boiling point in the autumn of 1880. This was due to the pressure exerted by Porte to the Albanians, in order for the latter surrender the city of Ulqini (Dulcigno) to Montenegro, something the Albanians strictly refused to do. However, as the Western threats towards Turkey and Albanians ensued, Turkey mobilized its military and began to fight the Albanian armed forces situated in city itself. The fight lasted about two days (22<sup>nd</sup> -24<sup>th</sup> November 1880), and on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 1880 "a Convention was concluded between Turkey and Montenegro, for the cession of Dulcigno to Montenegro" (Hertslet, 1891, p. 3009). This perhaps can be considered a (key) turning point in the Ottoman-Albanian relations.

As the situation changed, the Albanians began to revise the objectives, devising concepts for protests (or even war) to protect the national interest. By the year 1881, Albanians were pretty firm about the demand, and now they were asking for higher autonomy. By January 1881 one of the key League leaders, Ali Pasha of Gussinje arrived in Skopje along with "with 700 men, and has been proclaimed Prince of Albania" ('News in brief', 1881, p.5). About a week later, in another move in this direction, in Dibra (another Albanian town), "a scheme for autonomous government of Albania was adopted" ('News in brief', 1881a, p.5). In addition to that, as a

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<sup>6</sup> The relatively good relations with Ottoman authorities prompted Abdyl bey Frasheri, in October 1879, to cofound "the Constantinople Society for the Publication of Albanian Writing". (Elsie 2012, p.148).



result of aggravated situation, the Albanian League forbade "the [Albanian] men to swell the army of the Sultan, while declaring its readiness to assist the Caliph on his conferring semi-autonomy on Albania." ("Turkish Troops on the Greek Frontier", 1881, p.3) The tensions created, eventually resulted in a fight between Turkish forces the Albanian League" ('News in brief', 1881b, p.5).

The evolving circumstances were detrimental to the Albanian League, respectively to the Albanian cause. By May 1881, Turkish government has arrested almost all chiefs of the Albanian League ('News in brief', 1881b, p.5). During these unpleasant times, Albanians began to direct resources towards the European powers for mediation and help. ('Turkey', 1881a, p.7) This period marked also crushing the Prizren League, but not the Albanian struggle to reach their national objectives.

As developments were unfolding, the interests of the Ottomans and Albanians became incompatible. Subsequently, even the view towards one another was gradually changing. This was apparent, mostly by the Prizren League, who in turn, began to change its mission and vision. Consequently, the Porte thought that the League could "fall to pieces as soon as it was left to itself. But the cession of the Albanian territory to Montenegro changed the aspect and the purpose of the League...Thus the League, originally used and encouraged by the PORTE for its own purposes, has acquired an independent vitality of its own. ...[Albanian] leaders seemed to have been men of no little vigour and tenacity of purpose. They saw that changes were taking place around them, that Bosnia and Herzegovina were withdrawn from Turkish rule altogether, that Bulgaria had acquired independence, and eastern Roumelia administrative autonomy, that cession were made to Montenegro and demanded by Greece, and they naturally drew the conclusion that it was better to claim their own independence than to run the risk of a transfer to some neighbouring Power" ('London', 1881, p.11).

The gradual decay of the Ottoman Empire was not unheeded by the Balkan nations. This made the nations of the region reflect to the status quo (of the time), mobilize the capacities available, and endeavour to find ways and means to grab, as much territory, as possible. Now Albanians began to doubt the Ottoman "power and even its will, to defend them. Thus the League, originally used and encouraged by the PORTE for its own purposes, has acquired an independent vitality of its own. The fear of aggression whether of the PORTE or any other Power, is the one strong

feeling which Albanian tribes have in common, and it seems to suffice to render their union, at least for defensive purposes, a real one...[Thus] Created to aid the PORTE,...[the League] seems to have turned against its patrons" (ibid).

By the year 1882, the Albanians appear to have had developed different inclination, but apparently, the interests of Western powers, also shifted. Now, at this stage, some wanted Austria to occupy Albania, as soon as, conditions allow. ('Current Foreign Topics', 1882, p.1). *The Economist*, reported that even Italy had intentions "of entrance into Albania." ('Prince Bismarck and Turkey', 1882, p.1). By the end of 1882, however, it was reported that even Austrians seemed "not backward in taking advantage of this new phase of the Eastern question, and finding pretext already for the Austrian troops to appear in Albania" ('Egypt', 1882a, p.5).

The tense situation in Albania attracted widespread attention. Analyzing the developments *The Economist* reported that "The revolt of the Albanians is, however, a revolt of Mussulmans, acknowledged to be orthodox, well known throughout the Empire,...And it is exceedingly probable that the Albanians will succeed,...and they have a secret sympathy of Greece, Italy, and Austria,...Those powers cannot send them men, but they can supply engineers, arms and diplomatic pressure which the Sultan, pressed as he is in his capital by all manner of influences, and especially by want of money, finds it difficult to resist" ('Position of Sultan in Asia', 1881, p.3).

The crushing the Albanian League, however, was perceived to have been a bad idea, even by the Ottoman government itself. Soon afterwards, as the Great Britain Foreign Office (1920) underlines, "Porte found it to its interest to revive the Albanian League in order to oppose the cession of a strip of south Albania".(p.40) In fact, the Ottomans, needed Albanian support to prevent the ceding of the Albanian towns such as of Janina and Prevesa, to Greece.<sup>7</sup> During the following years, due to severity of the situation, and probably due to inability to get employed, the Albanians interest to get job, shifted to Egypt, (in security and defense mechanisms), far away from Albania. Indeed, by the end of 1882 a number of Albanians

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<sup>7</sup> The Ottomans, in 1881, eventually, with apparent support of France (Great Britain Foreign Office, 1920, p.40), succeeded to prevent Janina and Prevesa towns to be annexed to Greece, but failed with the district of Arta. (Scott-Keltie, 1887, p.327)

were enlisted in to serve in Egypt, in urban police force ('Egypt', 1882, p.5), and by 1884 in military too ('Latest Intelligence', 1884, p.5).

Politically, however, the Austrian factor seem to have taken prominence among the Albanians, with respect to restoring order in Albania. Thus, by about mid 1883 "an Albanian envoy has gone to Vienna to ask the intervention of the Austrian Government [in this regard]". ('Current Foreign Topics', 1883, p.5) Moreover, later, the Albanian chiefs were preparing "a petition for an Austrian protectorate". ('The Eastern Crisis', 1885a, p.5). Besides, the Albanians were considering also other alternatives. By the end of the 1883, Albanians residing in different parts of the European Turkey "sent a petition to the powers hostile to Turkey, asking for annexation to Greece." ('Current Foreign Topics', 1883a, p.5), or the so called union with Kingdom of Greece ('Servia and Bulgaria', 1885, p.3).

The hostile environment created, did not suit, the Ottomans either. In fact, Porte reacted by showing interest towards making peace with Albanians by taking certain steps to appease the latter. It proposed, a famous Albanian politician, Bid Doda, as the Turkish candidate for the office of Governor of the Lebanon ('News in Brief', 1883, p.5). Furthermore, as gesture of goodwill, Ottoman authorities later also released "[t]wo hundreds Albanian political prisoners, who have been imprisoned in Constantinople ...by the order of the Sultan" ('Latest Intelligence', 1884a, p.5).

However, the report on the implementation of the delimitation of the Montenegrin frontier still brought renewed anger to the Albanians, who began fresh revolt against Porte. ('Latest Intelligence', 1884b, p.5). Inability to find a constructive solution to the Albanian grievances regarding the delimitation of the Montenegrin frontier, prompted Sultan, to offer the Prince of Montenegro, "a fine property on the Bosphorus" ('Latest Intelligence', 1884c, p.5), as a part of eventual final compromise (ibid).

In the meantime the Albanians "formed a National Committee aiming at autonomy...[and were] collecting money and munitions of war." ('Europe's Disorderly Elements', 1884, p.7). Disturbances, were reported to have continued even in 1885 ('Albania', 1885, p.5). By August 1885 the situation in Albania was very bad, with Albanians, having formed a league in the north, aimed "to resist by arms all attempts at innovation on the part of the Government" ('Albania', 1885a, p.5).

By September 1885, however, the fighting between Turkish and Albanian forces ensued in Gjakova district ('News', 1885, p.5). By October

of that year, situation calmed down, in the latter district, with the truce being restored ('The Eastern Crisis', 1885, p.5). By the end of 1885 Albanian tribe leaders were holding frequent gatherings, in order to form a new credible league against Porte ('The Revolution in Eastern Roumelia', 1885, p.5).

This was a critical situation, and the role of foreign media may have had serious repercussions for the entire region. Different sources, however, reported on the events and the developments on the grounds. Heeding them carefully was indispensable. Apparently reports coming from the Western source, were considered more credible. On the other hand, the reports arriving from Slavic sources were not taken seriously. *The London Times* (dated 16 March 1885) noted that "alarming accounts have just arrived of the insurrection in Albania, but coming from Slav sources there must be received with caution." ('The Turkish Balkan Provinces', 1885, p.5) The Western distrust with Slavic or Serbian sources is reaffirmed again sometimes later by the British daily, highlighting that "No faith can be attached to a telegram from Belgrade which was published in the *Neue Frie Presse* this morning" ('The Macedonian Question', 1885, p.7).

By the late 1885, Ottomans began to change the strategy in relations to the Albanian cause, conducive to the latter. The rather constant regional threat perception shaped Ottoman security policy behaviour, resulting in decision to equip and mobilize the Albanians, in order to fight, after all, for their cause. In November 1885, *The London Times* (dated 9 November 1885) reports that "The Porte has sent ...60,000 Martini-Henry rifles to be distributed among the Mussulman populations in Albania and Macedonia...The popular sentiment of Mussulman and Catholic population in Albania is opposed to any concession of territory being made to the Servians and Greeks..." ('The Eastern Crisis', 1885b, p.5).

This event seem to have, rather satisfactory fulfilled the Albanians. Unlike a few years ago when the Albanians prevented their fellow nationals "to swell the army of the Sultan." ('Turkish Troops on the Greek Frontier', 1881, p.3), by 1885, the circumstances changed. In fact, by the end of 1885 Albanians claimed to have about 2,000 volunteers, in disposal for the Porte should circumstances demand. ('The Eastern Crisis', 1885c, p.5) Yet still, these developments, however, appeared to have not affected the Albanian agenda towards their apparent independence goal. Indeed, at the beginning of the 1886, the Albanians held a meeting in Elbasan, in which hundreds of Albanians took part (somewhat a resurrection of the Prizren

League), and “voted resolutions against the cession of Epirus to Greece, on the grounds that their province was Albanian and must form part of the great Albania of the future” (*‘The Eastern Crisis’*, 1886, p.5).

Ottoman indifference towards this development, may make one think that Porte was, somehow, getting discouraged to consider renewing hostilities with the Albanians. Yet still, to the astonishment of Albanians, the Ottoman Sultan, by about mid-1886, had plans to create fully-fledged Albanian army within the empire. This development is revealed by the British daily, in August 1886, when it noted that “An Imperial decree ordains the formation of a Commission to study a project of military organization in Albania and what sort of system of recruitment would be applicable to that peculiar country...The object of this measure is to create an army in Albania which shall suffice for all local purposes of internal order and defence against foreign aggression. If it should prove practicable, Albania would be in a state to take care of itself...” (*‘Albania’*, 1886, p.3).

However, in spite of late Ottoman efforts to appease the Albanians, some Western capitals had other thoughts for Albania. In fact, by the end of this decade, Italy exposed some old ambitions towards Albania. Similar to that of the year 1882 (highlighted above), Italy’s ambitions of occupying Albania were revived several years later. This is confirmed (at the end of 1887) during the meeting of Francesco Crispi (an Albanian, and the former Italian Prime Minister) with the Prince Bismarck Germany, where the former highlighted “Italian expansion [interest also] towards... Albania” (*‘Germany and Italy’*, 1887, p.5).

It is seemed apparent that various calculations were made in certain Western capitals on how to ‘solve’ the Albanian question. As study highlighted, Vienna and Rome ‘offered’ rather self-centered ambitions to finally solve the Albanian question. The London, however, on the other hand, unlike the former two capitals, made a more comprehensive proposal, for eventual solution, that incorporated the entire Balkans, including Albania. As *The New York Times* reported, England, by the end of the year 1890, exposed “a proposition to the powers that they agree upon a federation of the Balkan states, including Roumania, Bulgaria, Servia, Montenegro, and a part of Albania” (*‘The Balkan States’*, 1890, p.5).

After all, looking at a broad picture, one can ‘conventionally’ sense that the Western powers, although they largely comprehended the Balkan challenges, they, idiosyncratically, were also players in many of the nineteenth century injustices. Their words, actions, threats and or

indifferences at various circumstances or events, at least, during the 1876-1880 period, cost, (notably), the Albanians dearly.

## 6. Conclusion

This research centers on highlighting selected Albanian developments in the period between 1876 up to 1890. The key focus is the establishment of the Albanian Prizren League and the related developments associated to the Albanian cause. A number of events and developments that had critical impact in the history of Balkans, in general, and that of Albanians in particular, have been selected and analyzed.

The significant part of the nineteenth century was marked with noticeable beginning of Ottoman Empire weakening, and the Albanians unsuspecting the imminence of war. This, however, was not overlooked by the Balkans Orthodox nations. It is worth underlining that for most of the nineteenth century Albania was among the largest and the most populous nations in the Balkans, exceeding by far Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro (see Table 1 below). Indeed, although with borders not clearly identified, the Albanian territory was *de facto* recognized to be “between the Adriatic and Mount Pindus” (Reclus, 1883, p.89).

**Table 1:** Selected period of territory and population of four Balkan nations: Montenegro, Serbia, Greece and Albania

	<b>Territory in km<sup>2</sup> (1830-1875)</b>	<b>Population (1840)</b>
<b>Montenegro/Montenegrins</b>	3,855	100,000
<b>Serbia/Serbs</b>	37,943	886,000
<b>Greece/Greeks</b>	41,476	900,000
<b>Albania/ Albanians</b>	64,283*	1,600,000

**Source:** (Denton, 1877, p.15), ('The vexed question as to the delimitation', 1884, p.9), (Anderson and Hershey, 1918, pp. 102, 127, 439-440), (Wade, 1931, p. 330), (Schem, 1878, p.435), (Boué, 1840, p.32).

\*Territory of Albania refers to territory that remained (at the end of 1878) after losing some considerable territory between the years 1876-1878.

NOTE: The territory figures presented in square kilometers (km<sup>2</sup>) are converted from square miles.

The establishment of the League apparently was instigated secretly from the Ottomans, who in turn, (initially) did not perceive any risk from such organization. This is noted by the *The London Times* (dated 23 April 1881), who concludes that, "the League was formed under the secret patronage of the PORTE, which saw no danger to its own interests".('London',1881, p.11) The Albanian Prizren League, however, seemed to have united, both, the Ottomans and Albanians on the critical mutual beneficial concerns, namely the reluctance to handover Ottoman administered Albanian territory. Later, (at the end of the 1880), following the Ottoman-Albanian short battle over the handing over of the city of Ulqini (Dulcigno), each side followed a somewhat independent path, though relations, moderately smoothed, sometimes later.

Yet, the normal life and economic and infrastructural developments seems to have continued, despite the ongoing tensions. The Ottoman government in 1881 granted "[t]he right of cutting timber in the forests of Northern Albania...to a French company..." ('Turkey', 1881, p.5) Furthermore, transport infrastructure in Albania was also given a great importance. Indeed, by about April 1885, plans to construct a railway between Prizren and Shengjin (San Giovanni di Medua) harbour, were already under discussion with Italian engineers arriving "to make preliminary studies" ('News in brief', 1885, p.5). A few years later, in 1890, the Germans were negotiating with Ottoman authorities on another railway plan, this time linking Mitrovica and Shkodra, about 300 km long ('The Balkan States', 1890, p.3).

This study, in the introduction section put forward a number of questions related to topics concerned. Based on the research question put forward the study draws final conclusions.

- First, the carving of the Albanian land by the Balkan Orthodox alliance alarmed the Albanian nation. Ottomans, realized that they are rather unable to bring back the lost territory, and moreover, even largely incapable to prevent further partition. This was principally going to the detriment of the Albanian nation. The establishment of an Albanian mechanism that mobilized the Albanian population to stand-up and oppose, with words and actions, the division of their land, was indispensable for the nation. From such a motivated organization (fighting for a just cause), even Porte perceived benefits.
- Second, the study finds that the creation of the Prizren League was secretly aided by the Porte, who itself saw productive gains from such

establishment. Apparently even the **resolutions** (*Kararname*) of the League underlined that the aim of the Albanian nation was, rather exclusively, focused towards preventing division of their land, and did not, (initially), have independence intentions. Such demands seemed to be compatible with Ottoman objectives at the time.

- Third, the research determined that the Albanian persistence to resist the handing over of the Ulqini town, despite enormous pressure internationally, was critical, resulting in severance of the relations between the Ottoman authorities and the Albanian League, respectively the Albanian nation. The battle the ensued, between the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November 1880, apparently made the Albanian League consider changing the political demands. Practically, as from the 1881, the Albanians were no longer seeking basic autonomy within the Turkey, but they advanced their demands. Many of the developments that followed (discussed above) seemed to have evolved in the direction of self-government. As the tensions between the sides increased, Ottoman authorities, undertook severe measures, among others massively arresting the Albanian League members. The resulting circumstances made it practically impossible for the League to effectively resume its activities, respectively its goals. The severe conditions developed, in turn, played a critical role to the eventual extinguishment of the League. The situation, later showed signs of calmness, eventually prompting the Porte to release about “[t]wo hundreds Albanian political prisoners, who have been imprisoned in Constantinople” (*Latest Intelligence*, 1884a, p.5).
- Fourth, during the period 1878-1881, the Ottoman authorities often endeavoured to fulfil the Albanian nation in certain ways, which, in turn, was, also, largely to their own benefit.
  - a. The study found that Porte supported Albanians to the establishment of the Prizren League, and their respective political demands, since the latter did not endanger the integrity of the Ottoman territory.
  - b. Porte, eventually re-negotiated the Berlin Treaty, (later during 1878) regarding the Ulqini town, and succeeded to return back town, to the satisfaction of the Albanians (Hertslet, 1891, p.2675,



- ‘The naval demonstration’, 1880, p.4).<sup>8</sup> Again, this development was also productive for the Ottoman political objectives.
- c. The high level European tour, undertaken by the Prizren League leaders, was, apparently of great importance even to Porte. On their return to the homeland, the Albanian leaders transmitted a report to Ottoman Prime Minister (Grand Vizier) informing him about the experience and outcomes of their European tour.
  - d. Ottoman authorities enabled (in October 1879) the leader of the Prizren League, Abdyl bey Frasheri, to establish (cofound) “the Constantinople Society for the Publication of Albanian Writing” (Elsie 2012, p.148).
  - e. Ottomans, additionally, fought hard to change another Berlin Treaty disposition, referring to the surrender of the Albanian towns namely, Janina and Prevesa to Greece. This was another successful endeavour, where the Ottomans, in 1881, finally succeeded<sup>9</sup> to prevent Janina and Prevesa towns to be annexed to Greece, but failed with the district of Arta (Scott-Keltie, 1887, p.327).
  - f. In the 1880, Porte named Abeddin Pasha, (an Albanian by origin) as Ottoman Foreign Minister. The latter was deemed an appropriate choice to address the Albanian concerns, both, internally and internationally.
- Fifth, even though the Albanian Prizren League, did not manage to prevent the carving up of their territory, still, undoubtedly, had a significant impact in the Albanian history evolution. The League, above all, managed to mobilize the nation to fight for a just cause, and equally important, to sensitize the Western community about enduring horrors that the Albanian nation encountered. The Western world, even though closely observed the developments, yet, they largely overlooked the Albanian pleas. Moreover, their antipathy towards them culminated at the 1878 Berlin Congress, to the large dismay of the Albanian nation, who had hoped for at least some

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<sup>8</sup> Later, at the end of 1880, Ulqini town, after the immense international pressure, was ceded to Montenegro.

<sup>9</sup> France played a critical role in facilitating the reaching of the agreement, thus preventing the surrender of larger Albanian territory to Greece, with the exception of Arta district. (Great Britain Foreign Office, 1920, p.40)

productive justice. In return, they received additional painful news, with which they had to bear in the years and decades to come. After all, the Prizren League, demonstrated a national unity and strong determination to rise up against perceived injustices of the time. Even though it extinguished a few years after its formation, still, it set a pattern that played a critical role to the future Albanian Leagues establishments. The meeting of Albanians, that followed, in Elbasan (in 1886), was considered a resurrection of the Prizren League. The legacy of the Prizren League, did not end here. By the end of the nineteenth century, more accurately in January of 1899, “[i] an effort to revive the spirit of the League of Prizren...[Albanians formed] the League of Peja” (Elsie, 2015, p.165) The Albanian commitment, unity and cohesion, was noticeably explicit even during the 1990s Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) wars, against Serbian occupying forces. Such enormous Albanian mobilization, was, very likely inspired from their forefathers, among the best examples being the former Leagues of, Prizren and Peja. However, in the 1990s, unlike in the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, the Western powers’ antipathy towards Albanians was largely transformed into explicit support and encouragement for them, which in turn effectively ended, both, the Albanian suffering in Kosovo and the eighty-seven years of Serbian occupation of that territory. Probably, some settlements of accounts, stemming from the nineteenth century, took place, something Prizren League leadership and their co-nationals, then, strived for.

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